



## Department of Veterans Affairs

**Miramar National Cemetery**  
5795 Nobel Drive  
San Diego, CA 92122

## **News Release**

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### **First Casket Buried at Miramar National Cemetery**

John Alfred Smith became the first military Veteran to receive a casket burial at Miramar National Cemetery in San Diego today. With the first casket interment at the new national cemetery, casket and cremation burial alternatives are now available to approximately 235,000 Veterans in San Diego County for the first time in 45 years.

"VA is very pleased to once again be able to provide the full range of burial benefits to the Veterans of greater San Diego," said Acting Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Steve Muro. "These are benefits that our Veterans in the Golden State have earned."

Smith served as a combat medic with the 1st Air Cavalry Division in Vietnam, 1968-1969. He was wounded in action three times and spent several years recovering from his wounds. He was medically retired as a disabled Veteran at the rank of Specialist 5 in 1972.

After earning an advanced degree in clinical psychology from Columbia University, Smith began working for the U.S. Postal Service, and he and his family settled in San Diego in 1982. He worked for the Postal Service more than 20 years before retiring in 1999.

Smith made it his mission to aid as many fellow Veterans as possible, through his membership and active roles in the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Chula Vista Post #2111 including service on the VFW's National Legislative Committee, and with the American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the United Veterans Council of San Diego County, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, Vietnam Veterans of America, and many U.S. Army organizations. He was one of the original founders of Vietnam Veterans of San Diego, which grew to become the Veterans Village of San Diego, serving all of the region's military Veterans and their families, but especially homeless Veterans, through a wide variety of outreach and residential programs, including Veterans Stand-Down. He was a special representative for the California Department of Veterans Affairs, starting his career with CalVet at the Chula Vista State Veterans Home when it opened in 2000.

Although it remains active interring family members of those already buried there and with inurnments of cremated remains in its columbarium, Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery closed to first interment casket burials in 1966. The new cemetery, adjacent to the Marine Corps Air Station, conducted its first interments of cremated remains in November 2010.

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## **Miramar NC Begins Burials 2/2/2**

Riverside National Cemetery, located 90 miles from Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery, was until today the nearest national cemetery offering full burial options. When completed, the new Miramar National Cemetery will include both gravesite and columbarium options, providing a full range of burial alternatives to Veterans and their families in the San Diego County area.

Phase 1 construction of Miramar National Cemetery will include approximately 11,500 conventional gravesites; 4,900 in-ground cremation sites; 10,000 columbarium niches; an administration building and maintenance complex; two committal service shelters; and a public assembly area. The project will also incorporate systems for water distribution, roads, utilities, signs and landscaping.

Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Also eligible are military personnel who die on active duty, their spouses and eligible dependents. Other burial benefits available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker. VA also provides a bronze medallion that can be affixed to an existing privately-purchased headstone or marker to signify the deceased's status as a Veteran. Families of eligible decedents may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment.

In the midst of the largest expansion since the Civil War, VA operates 131 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. More than 3.7 million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA's national cemeteries on nearly 20,000 acres of land.

Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov) or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. To make burial arrangements at the time of need at any VA national cemetery, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117. Additional information about the Miramar National Cemetery is available by calling the Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery office at 619-553-2084.